

The Mirage in Architectural Studio Teaching

Amira Elnokaly¹, Carlos Marquez², Ahmed Elseragy³

^{1,2} Senior Lecturer, Lincoln School of Architecture, Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, The University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln, LN6 7TS, United Kingdom

³ Associate Professor, Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design Department, Academy for Science and Technology, AAST, Alexandria, Egypt

aelnokaly@lincoln.ac.uk; cmarquez@lincoln.ac.uk; ahmed.elseragy@aast.edu

The idea introduced in this paper is culled from a wide spectrum of issues the authors have explored in design studio teaching over a period of two decades. One of the affirmations that it is possible to do with regard to the education in the Architecture studio, is the consensus of high expectations in this process. Nevertheless, this aspiration shared by tutors and tutees can end up by being a mirage. In the definition of the mirage the perception of what is seen, is determined by the ambience. This process is inserted in a place and specific time, the environmental conditions of this process of education and learning are, as in reality, determinant for a more real and useful perception.

One of the pitfalls that hide a more collective reflection concerning the topic of learning in studio is the permanent urgency of the theoretical and/or professional agendas in architecture. This environmental condition determines the vision, reflection and the practice of the architecture. Nevertheless, this energy and attention tends to alienate the most permanent need of a reflection with regard to the daily action of learning in studio.

The studio Culture is an extraordinary way of learning that has survived 275 years, and has been in discourse since then. This culture is created in a field of tension between reason, emotion and intuition, on both sides ‘Tutor/Student and Student/Tutor’. Schon (1981,83) has long identified three reasons why studio teaching could go wrong as the Stance adopted towards communication, the qualities of the ‘behavioural world they created for each other, and thirdly the theory in use.

The importance of this statement, shift the attention from declared intentions (Learning outcomes) written in programmes and the expected standard, to the student’s and tutor own experiences. Concomitantly, studio teaching/learning process can go wrong today for a number of reasons and expectations, the syndrome of viewing architecture as art and only art, the syndrome of embedding an envisioned ambiguous sustainable agenda, and the syndrome of emphasizing the development of skills at the expense of knowledge.

Clear guideline in objectives and standards are developed in the form of learning contract (Learning outcome, teaching methodology, assessment criteria, etc.). Special consideration has been given to the semantic of it. However, design process is a not a solving - programme mental method that operates as a recipe, neither a completely random exercise for the sake of the imaginary. Individuals make a difference with theirs own contributions. Tutors in the way they created the safe environment for risk taking and students which committed themselves for their own agendas. But it is by no doubt the tutor’s responsibility to stick to the learning outcomes, and develop it based on his/her own experience. Developing the outcome is therefore, a complete different story then operating his/her own hidden agenda that does not fulfil the requirements of the contract the tutor is eligible to fulfil for the student.

However, a text and discourse analysis studied revealed that an objective defined as outcome in a particular learning contract, vary in its meaning and

interpretation and within the relationship; Students-Students. / Students –Tutor / Tutor-Tutor / Tutor- External. Hidden values, circumstantial agendas are sometimes legitimised by the power the tutor have on his/her own studio.. The outcome of this procedure could have a negative effect on tutors and tutees. This in turn has a mal effect on motivation and self confidence, which are both crucial components of an optimal experience in learning.

“It is about learning! and, it is about time”. A needed switch: it is not about *performance*, but *Learning process*, it is about accomplishing and improvement, but mainly about a deep review of our studio practice. In essence, this paper identifies illusions present in architecture studio teaching. It sheds the lights on hidden agendas within the studio and the effect these agendas have on the long term architects (architectural students) that such environments develop. The results of investigating this multilayered studio teaching approach offers important lessons to be learnt in our design studio teaching for both Tutors and Tutees.

Keywords: Architecture Education; Studio Teaching; Studio Culture; Learning Outcome